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Testimony for the Appropriations Committee in support of increasing staff at the
Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division

Dear co-chairs and members of the committee,

My name is Evelyn Nuñez, and I am currently a junior at Yale University. Over the past year I've served as Community Action Chair for MEChA, a student activism group on campus that focuses on social justice issues affecting a number of marginalized communities, especially the Latino Community. Throughout that year I have witnessed the rampant wage theft violations that occur in our city, and it concerns me that workplace violations are extremely common within New Haven. I have heard the testimonies of workers from a variety of different industries, and their consensus is the same: all at some point have been cheated of wages for work they have done. Additionally, very few of these cases have received justice.

I've learned more about the action workers can take to demand their wages back from their employer, and the reality is that the current system has few resources to effectively deal with these complaints. I've sat in on meetings between city officials and representatives from the Department of Labor who have discussed the dire need for more personnel. A case that demonstrates this need for more funding is the recent investigation that was opened against Gourmet Heaven, a deli in New Haven that has been found guilty of wage theft. This investigation was opened this past July by one worker who finally decided to speak out against the abuses that were happening at this deli. Investigators were having difficulty obtaining information and the process was stalled for quite some time. In August, community members and students decided to put pressure on Chung Cho by organizing weekly picket lines and calling for a boycott of the establishment. These protests went on for an entire semester, and they are still currently going on because Cho has not paid what he owes and has violated the law again. The duration of this case is coming very close to a year, and workers have still not seen justice. Part of this delay is due to Cho's lack of cooperation, but the other part of this delay is due to limited resources within the Department of Labor. It would be shortsighted to say the investigators on this case are not doing their job properly because they are indeed doing as much as they can with the time and resources available to them. If the Department of Labor had more funding, these cases could be addressed in a timely fashion. Workers would not have to wait a year or over a year to receive the wages they are owed.

Once community members saw that state departments could not efficiently deal with this case, they used their own tactics to bring about justice. I, along with members of Unidad Latina en Acción and other Yale students, have spent Friday after Friday walking in a picket line on Broadway Avenue because there has been a grave injustice in our community that has yet to be addressed. In moments of adversity, communities come together to fight back against abuses, but this struggle should not always be one that the community has to fight. We have set up institutions that are responsible for holding employers accountable and ensuring that all workers have equal opportunities. Equality is

one of the core values of our nation, and it is time that federal agencies begin to reflect this commitment.

Thank you.

Evelyn Núñez